



# *The Insider*

[www.senate.mi.gov/switalski](http://www.senate.mi.gov/switalski)

## **Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10**

**August 4, 2006**

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at [senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov) or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

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### **Mickey's Blog: ThunderChickens Come Home To Roost**

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I realized I was on to something during the Sterling Heights Memorial Day Parade, when I kept seeing people along the parade route in their distinctive, lime-green ThunderChickens T-shirts.

Ed Debler, an engineer who is a frequent visitor to my monthly office hours at the Sterling Heights and Clinton Township Libraries, had told me about the exploits of the ThunderChickens. He had asked for a Senate resolution or tribute, and presented me with two shirts, one for myself, and another for my pal Jennie G.

You may know her as the Governor.

ThunderChickens, you say?

The ThunderChickens are the robotics team fielded by about 45 students from the various high schools in the Utica Community Schools System. Heck, they even let in a guy from Warren Con's Sterling Heights High School. And this was no ordinary collection of computer geeks. The ThunderChickens had just won the world championship at the FIRST Robotics Competition in Atlanta, Georgia. More than 1,130 teams from the United States and six other nations competed and the local team came out on top!

Each winter, First Robotics, the organization that sponsors the competitions, announces the rules for the new game. Competing teams get the same materials to work with, and must design and construct a robot to perform a complicated task. This year, the robots had to shoot foam balls into a receptacle about 10 feet in the air. The robot had to do this better than the other team's robots, and it had to do this while the other team's robots were trying to stop, or even kill it.

It's not your grandpa's erector set. The target for the balls had a light above it, and the ThunderChickens robot had a camera eye to acquire and lock in on the targets, even while other robots were bumping it and trying to incapacitate it.

It turns out the toughest part of the design was to create a feeder system to load the ammunition without ever jamming.

With the help of teachers at the Math Science Center, retired engineers, and parents, the kids were able to devise a robot that would put HAL, C3PO, Johnny 5, and any other robot to shame. The kids did this with project teams that closely mirror the changes that have come to modern manufacturing and industrial technology. Teams and students at different sites collaborated from remote locations and worked cooperatively to solve problems that emerged at any point in the process.

It is the best introduction kids could get to today's workplace. And it isn't just the engineering and manufacturing workplace. The ThunderChickens organization is incredibly sophisticated. The ThunderChickens are actually a corporation, with a board of directors made up of adults and sponsors.

Each year they appoint a student to be the CEO of the corporation, and other students serve as Finance Director, Marketing Director, and Public Relations Director. They even have a writer to promote the ThunderChickens by telling their story.

Can you imagine being in High School and not only knowing what a corporation is, but actually being an officer in one? These students emerge from the months of hard work with real insight into how the world works.

And they raise thousands of dollars through sponsors to finance the construction of their robot and pay the entry fee of \$6,000 to get into the competitions. Right now there are about 100 robotics teams in the state, and the 2006-07 K-12 state school aid budget just passed by the Michigan Legislature put \$150,000 in competitive grants to be used by the districts towards the costs of participating in such competitions.

I attended the ThunderChickens banquet at Dave and Buster's in Utica to help celebrate their accomplishment and to present them with tributes from the Governor and Legislature. I got to see a fantastic promotional video they put together about themselves, and met their new student CEO.

The ThunderChickens are inspiring. And hopefully they will serve as an example for more students in Michigan to engage in activities that would provide them the skills, knowledge and experiences necessary to help them to be successful in the future. Check out the ThunderChickens website at <http://www.thunderchickens.org/>.

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## **Mickey's TV Insider Show**

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Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

### **Sterling Heights**

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Clinton Township**

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Utica**

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Roseville**

Various Times  
(Comcast Channel 18)

\*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

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### Coffee Hours

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\*Since my District Office is in Roseville, I do not have set coffee hours in Roseville. However, I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot. Everyone is welcome to attend the coffee hours and discuss their issues and concerns.

<b>August 7</b> <b>7-9 p.m.</b>  Location: Sterling Heights Public Library (40255 Dodge Park) Sterling Heights	<b>August 28</b> <b>7-9 p.m.</b>  Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library (40900 Romeo Plank) Clinton Township
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### Contact My Office

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